DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 297 601 FL 017 531

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TITLE Why Do We Want To Learn English? Ask Us!
PUB DATE Apr 88
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association for Bilingual Education (17th, Houston, TX, April 27-May 1, 1988).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *English (Second Language); Intermediate Grades; *Language Attitudes; Language Proficiency; *Learning Motivation; *Puerto Ricans; Second Language Learning; Self Concept; Self Concept Measures; *Student Motivation

ABSTRACT

A study examined the relationship between self-concept and motivation to learn English among Puerto Rican upper elementary school children from low socioeconomic status families. Fifty-seven native Spanish-speaking students attending urban bilingual education programs rated themselves on a pictorial self-concept scale and responded to a Likert-type scale of motivation to learn English. Analysis of the findings indicates that the students have more open attitudes toward the acquisition of English when they view the second language for personal gain or achievement of success rather than for total integration into mainstream society. (Author/MSE)

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Paper Presentation

WHY DO WE WANT TO LEARN ENGLISH? ASK US!

NABE
17th ANNUAL
INTERNATIONAL
BILINGUAL/BICULTURAL
EDUCATION CONFERENCE

April 27-May 1, 1988
HOUSTON, TEXAS

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses motivation for learning English in Hispanic bilingual students. Data from self-reports suggest that they have more open attitudes towards the acquisition of English when they view the second language as a personal gain for achievement and success rather than for total integration into the mainstream society.

ADRIANA PELLICARI RODRIGUEZ, Ed. D.

WHY DO WE WANT TO LEARN ENGLISH? ASK US!

INTRODUCTION

As someone who speaks several languages, I have a keen interest in motivation, as a variable affecting the acquisition of a second or more languages. As a psychologist, why people do what they do is a central part of my work. I am here to present a paper on the results of a study which examined the reasons expressed by Puerto Rican Spanish speaking students for wanting to learn English.

RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Littlewood (1984) tells us that there are at least three recognized non-linguistic factors in learning another language: motivation, intelligence and personality. Titone (1982) describes language as a hierarchical system of attitudes and deep sets belonging to personality, operating internally but showing outwardly depending on the communicative situation. In his conceptualized multi-level dynamic structure (comprised of the tactical plane, the strategic plane and the egodynamic plane), motivation fits into the ego-dynamic plane (1975). While we are not concerned here with measures of language proficiency, we have seen that "language aptitude and motivation, based on favorable attitudes, are the factors which have predicted success most regularly in the various research studies" (Littlewood, 1984, p.63). Past theorizing pertaining to the process of SLA has assigned an important role to motivation (Clement

& Kruidenier, 1983).

Motivation is the crucial force which determines whether a learner embarks on a task at all, how much energy s/he devotes to it, and how long s/he perseveres (Littlewood, 1984). As a complex phenomenon, it includes many components: the individual's drive, need for achievement and success, curiosity, desire for stimulation and to new experiences. Nida (1956) notes that we cannot speak of motivation as simply a desire to learn another language. He maintains that it needs to be discussed in terms of an interest in learning so much of a language, and for specific purposes.

When motivation is examined as a factor in SLA, contributing to the development of language proficiency and literacy, two major orientations have been proposed by authors such as Gardner and Lambert (Gardner 1968; Gardner et al, 1976; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner & Santos, 1970; Gardner & Smythe, 1975; Lambert, 1972): an intrumental motive and an integrative motive. At one extreme, instrumental orientation refers to pragmatic or utilitarian reasons for developing second language fluency, like academic achievement, getting ahead in one's occupation, usefulness in work and travel. At the other extreme, the integrative orientation characterizes those individuals who acquire a second language because of a desire to learn more about the "other" cultural community, to identify with and eventually become a member of the other group. Often, this second motive, of more social nature, appears to be associated with affective factors which may create conflicts within the individual: dissatisfaction with one's cultural group, feelings of anomie, et cetera.

Studies conducted by several investigators (Biondi, 1975; Lukmani, 1972; Oller et al., 1977; Spolsky, 1969) have produced inconsistent and contradictory results on the predictability of ESL proficiency based on

either integrativeness or instrumentality of motive, with a significantly higher correlation in favor of the former, the latter or an equally distributed relationship between the two. Contextual or cultural factors are cited by some investigators (Clement & Kruidenier, 1983) as contributive in producing the conflicting results obtained in studies of orientations. Initially Gardner and Lambert (1959) had supported the view that an integrative orientation is crucial to the formation of a strong motive toward the acquisition of proficiency in a second language, that is learners with higher integrative orientations are likely to achieve greater proficiency. Subsequently, however, Anisfeld and Lambert (1961) found that any one particular orientation may be indicative of attitudes toward the "other" language community, or a function of the individual's given stage in second language learning.

The research done by Gardner and Lambert (1972) would tend to suggest that for French-Americans learning English, an instrumental orientation will result in a more successful development of English, whereas an integrative outlook may be more beneficial for English speakers learning another language. While the distinction between instrumental and integrative orientations has been criticized by some authors as ambiguous (Clement & Kruidenier, 1983), Strong in 1984 adopted it in his investigation of the relationship between integrative motive and acquired second language proficiency in our target population: Spanish kindergarteners. He found no positive association between integrative orientation and acquired English proficiency. The results are not surprising! There are problems with the use of young children and their level of awareness and expression; problems with the use of sociograms, which employ peer nomination, a variable based outside of the individual. He then concluded that the reverse may be true: an inverse relationship

between English fluency and desire to integrate into the Anglo-American society. Finally, Gardner (Gardner 1980; Gardner & Gliksman, 1982; Gardner & Smythe, 1981) defends his position on the validity of affective variables in second language acquisition, by refuting the accusation posited by Oller & Perkins that their relationship to the development of a second language is weak and due to spurious effects of verbal intelligence and language proficiency (Oller, 1982).

Tucker (1976) proposes a positive attitude towards the learning of a second language for a better performance in all aspects of the language. Clement et al. (1977) further introduce another critical indicator of second language success: self-confidence, the willingness to take risks, which is inherent to a healthy self-concept. Clement and his colleagues support the view that it is a positive self concept which mediates between motivation and achievement. Other writers (Littlewood, 1984) also point out that intervening variables like traits of extroversion and empathy may get in the way to confound results.

Given the preceding theoretical assumptions, the hypotheses proposed in this piece of research were that there would be a significant relationship between Self Concept and motivation to learn English, and that instrumental orientation would show up as stronger in the data obtained.

METHOD AND RESULTS

Fifty seven Spanish speaking Hispanic students in upper elementary grades, from low SES families, attending bilingual programs in urban elementary schools, were asked to rate themselves on a non-verbal

pictorial cartoon-type, Self-Concept Scale for Children (Martinek & Zaichkoswsky, 1977). The sample included both boys and girls. Questionnaires of the Likert-scale type were also distributed to them: they were asked to respond to questions concerning Motivational Intensity to Learn English. A brief explanation about the nature and the purpose of the study was entertained with the students, so they would understand the meaning of such inquiry. Spanish was used as the language of interaction and language in the questionnaires, with the opportunity to switch to English, according to personal preference. Two example of such questions were:

1. Puedo conseguir un trabajo bueno o mejor si hablo ingles (INSTRUMENTAL MOTIVE)
2. Quiero pensar y portarme como los americanos (INTEGRATIVE MOTIVE)

Non-parametric statistics were used to analyze the data. Six Kendall's tau were performed to obtain a correlation based on rank, in an ex post-facto design. Identification of a relationship between the two following variables was sought:

a) the degree to which Hispanic children felt capable and comfortable within themselves;

b) the incentive to become proficient speakers of English and to adapt or resist sociolinguistic assimilation.

The findings indicated, to a statistical level of confidence, that those children who scored higher in the intensity to learn English viewed themselves in more positive ways, as capable of dealing with everyday's situations and looking with confidence upon school tasks. However, a greater number of those students also showed preference to learn English because it is more useful to them, as opposed to a desire to integrate (or assimilate) into the dominant group.

Category A examples (INSTRUMENTAL):

1. Necesito el ingles para terminar la escuela superior;
2. me gusta saber el ingles porque' quiero ser una persone util en este pais y en la sociedad;
3. poder hablar ingles me haria una persona bien educada.

Category B examples (INTEGRATIVE):

1. Si aprendo ingles tendre' mas amigos/as americanos;
2. tengo verguenza de hablar ingles delante de mucha gente;
3. todos mis amigos son americanos.

DISCUSSION and CONCLUSIONS

The results from this study confirm that an integrative orientation towards members of the target group does not necessarily enhance the desire to acquire their language, at least for the Spanish speaking population who has minority status in the U.S. In Strong's study, faster learners were able to progress in their English skills, without an overt wish to identify with Anglo-American children. That is, faster learners showed no discernable tendency toward rejecting their own culture, either by avoiding Spanish peers as playmates, anglicizing their names, or hesitating to take part in Hispanic cultural events.

The critical issue at play in this research is that, traditionally, language minorities in the United States have been expected to learn the language of the mainstream society and to assimilate into the dominant Anglo-American group, with a concurrent loss of their native tongue and to the exclusion of their own cultural values. This failure to integrate

bilinguality and biculturality into the self has negatively impacted upon the self-concept, engendering conflicts about one's own identity, the values subscribed and adhered to by one's family, ultimately leading to a denial of one's roots.

The implications considered here for future research, as well as for pedagogical approaches in the teaching of English as a second language, suggest that further probing into the attitudes and feelings of the learner may be indicated, versus expeditious political and administrative policies imposed upon the learner. Since it is the learner who is called upo to enact learning, this research would seem to prescribe a goal-oriented philosophy for teachers of English as a second language. The study provides the evidence that Hispanic students are more open to see a good reason to develop English fluency by being reminded of the advantage of adding another linguistic repertoire to the one they already possess, than by having to trade L1 for L2 (and C1 for C2), for fear of being excluded or viewed as unworthy.

The present data are in agreement with the findings of Bhatnagar (1980) in Canada. His study showed that students who retain their family language and add a second one for success and personal gain, are better adjusted individuals, more contributive to society, participatory in school activities. In the end, they are capable of becoming mediators between two cultures instead of being relegated to a role of marginality and anomie.

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